

Message Text

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S E C R E T KINSHASA 2644

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, CG

SUBJECT: SHABA INVASION: CONSULTATIONS WITH MOBUTU

REF: A. KINSHASA 2643 B. KINSHASA 2496

1. AS DEPT. IS AWARE, MOBUTU HAS TO DATE RESPONDED WELL TO OUR SUGGESTIONS THAT ZAIRE MOVE AHEAD TOWARD EVENTUAL DIPLOMATIC RESOLUTION OF THE SHABA PROBLEM IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT. AND THE DEPT WILL RECALL THAT, TO THIS END, HE TOOK OUR ADVICE TO REFRAIN FROM IMMEDIATELY BROADENING THE ISSUE BY LABELING THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA AS THE MAIN AGGRESSORS, AS HE WAS INTENDING TO DO WHEN THE INVASION STARTED.

2. REF A REPORTS MOBUTU'S EXPLICIT ACCUSATIONS ON MARCH 22 AGAINST THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS, CLAIMING THAT LATTER CONSTITUTED CADRES FOR KATANGAN ATTACKERS AND THAT FAZ INTERCEPTS REVEAL SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE SPEAKERS COMMUNICATION WITH THE FRONT LINES. MOBUTU THEN GOES ON TO NOTE THAT, IN CONTRAST TO ANGOLAN WAR, THERE HAS BEEN "LIGHTNING RESPONSE" FROM US, FRANCE AND BELGIUM.

3. MOBUTU'S ACCUSATIONS WILL PROBABLY CAUSE US PROBLEMS. THEY CONTRAST TO OUR CAUTIOUS STATEMENTS REGARDING EVIDENCE OF CUBAN/SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN THE SHABA INVASION--STATEMENTS

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WHICH WE BELIEVE ARE JUSTIFIED SO LONG AS FAZ IS UNABLE TO COME UP WITH TANGIBLE EVIDENCE. WE ARE NOT AWARE THAT FAZ HAS YET DONE SO, ALTHOUGH WE EXPECT THE GOZ WILL PROBABLY SURFACE EVIDENCY SOME TIME SOON.

4. MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE RISK TO MOBUTU OF A CREDIBILITY GAP ON THIS ISSUE, MOBUTU'S EFFORTS TO INTERNATIONALIZE THE SHABA

PROBLEM APPEAR DESIGNED TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE US AND ITS ALLIES TO STAND UP TO THE PERCEIVED SOVIET THREAT IN AFRICA. MOBUTU MAY ALSO HOPE TO MAKE SHABA AN ISSUE OF NATO CONCERN, FIGURING WESTERN GOVERNMENTS MIGHT BE MORE INCLINED TO EXTEND HELP VIA THIS FORUM THAN INDIVIDUALLY. THIS NEW COURSE CARRIES OBVIOUS RISKS FOR MOBUTU, IN THAT A TEPID OR NO RESPONSE FROM US COULD BE VIEWED BY HIS ENEMIES AND DOMESTIC OPPONENTS ALIKE AS A SIGNAL THAT THE WEST WILL NOT IN FACT BACK UP HIS REGIME. BUT GIVEN ZAIRE'S VULNERABLE POSITION AND MOBUTU'S REAL UNCERTAINTY AS TO WHETHER HE CAN COUNT ON ANY FURTHER HELP FROM US, HE PROBABLY FEELS IT IS A RISK WORTH TAKING.

5. MOBUTU'S CHARGES WOULD ALSO SEEM TO RISK COMPLICATING CURRENT EFFORTS TO MOVE TOWARD AFRICAN MEDIATION. WHILE I MAY BE WRONG, THEY WOULD SEEM TO MAKE THE WORK OF NIGERIA, AND PERHAPS OF OTHER AFRICANS WHO ARE INCLINED TO BE HELPFUL, MORE DIFFICULT IN TERMS OF TALKING REASON TO THE ANGOLANS AND KEEPING THIS AFFAIR OUT OF THE COLD WAR CONTEXT TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE.

6. ANOTHER BUT NOT UNRELATED ISSUE THAT COULD MAKE MORE DIFFICULT NOT ONLY OUR OWN FUTURE SUPPORT OF ZAIRE BUT ALSO THE CHANCES FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IS THAT OF GOZ USE OF FOREIGN MERCENARIES. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL I FLAGGED THIS POTENTIAL PROBLEM IN REFTEL. WHILE WE ARE NOT AWARE THAT MOBUTU HAS YET CALLED IN MERCENARIES, HE TELEPHONED ME THIS MORNING TO ASK IF I HAD RECEIVED ANY RESPONSE TO HIS MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT CARTER STATING THAT WHILE ZAIRE NEEDED US MATERIAL ASSISTANCE IT WOULD NEVER ASK FOR TROOPS (REF B). I REITERATED
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THAT I WAS SURE WASHINGTON APPRECIATED HIS ASSURANCES AND UNDERSTANDING OF OUR POSITION, BUT THAT I HAD NOT EXPECTED NOR ASKED FOR ANY SPECIFIC REPLY. MOBUTU SEEMED SATISFIED AND DID NOT PURSUE THE SUBJECT. WHILE MOBUTU MAY HAVE INTENDED HIS REMARKS AS A GENTLE REMINDER THAT HE STILL LOOKS FOR MORE MATERIAL HELP FROM US, I AM INCLINED TO PLACE THEM IN THE CONTEXT TO WHAT I CONSIDER TO BE HIS SIGNALS TO US THAT HE INTENDS TO CALL IN FOREIGN MERCENARIES AND WANTS US TO BE AWARE OF THAT BEFORE HAND.

7. I INTERPRET MOBUTU'S STRIDENT ATTACK ON THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS--CONTRARY TO OUR PREVIOUS ADVICE--AS REFLECTING HIS ANXIETY THAT, THE SECOND PLANE HAVING LANDED, WE MAY BE READY TO STAND DOWN ON ANY FURTHER MILITARY ASSISTANCE; AND THAT HIS BEST CHANCE FOR OUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IS TO START SOUNDING THE ALARM OF GREAT POWER INVOLVEMENT. HE MAY LIKewise FIGURE THAT HIS SIGNALS ON MERCENARIES WILL TRIGGER A PLEA FROM US NOT TO GO THAT ROUTE, IN WHICH CASE I SUSPECT HE WILL PUSH FOR MORE ASSISTANCE AS A QUID QUO PRO.

8. I BELIEVE I SHOULD DISCUSS THESE ISSUES FRANKLY WITH MOBUTU, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT WE ARE DOING OUR BEST TO HELP DESPITE EVIDENT DOMESTIC CRITICISM, BUT THAT TO DO SO WE NEED HIS FULL COOPERATION. HE WOULD OF COURSE SEEK TO EXPLOIT ANY SUCH APPROACH TO ASK FOR MORE AID, AND WE SHOULD THEREFORE HAVE SOME IDEA OF WHERE WE ARE GOING ON THAT SCORE BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER OR HOW HARD TO HIT ON THESE POINTS. WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S GUIDANCE.
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